



## What is it?

### Points To Remember About Reactive Arthritis

- Reactive arthritis is pain or swelling in a joint caused by an infection in your body. You may also have red, swollen eyes and a swollen urinary tract.
- Doctors may use a combination of tests to confirm that you have reactive arthritis.
- Symptoms are usually treated with medications that reduce inflammation, fight infection, and stop your immune system from attacking its own tissues.
- Exercise can reduce joint pain and stiffness. It can also help you lose weight to reduce stress on joints.

Reactive arthritis is pain or swelling in a joint that is caused by an infection in your body. You may also have red, swollen eyes and a swollen urinary tract. These symptoms may occur alone, together, or not at all.

Most people with reactive arthritis recover fully from the first flare of symptoms and can return to regular activities two to six months later. Some people will have long-term, mild arthritis. A few patients will have long-term, severe arthritis that is difficult to control with treatment and may cause joint damage.

## Who gets it?

Men between ages 20 and 40 are most likely to get reactive arthritis. Men are also more likely than women to get the form that is caused by a bacteria passed along during sex. Women and men are at equal risk of getting the disease because of bacteria in food. Women with reactive arthritis often have milder symptoms than men.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of reactive arthritis may be so mild that you do not notice them. They can come and go over a period of weeks or months. In a few people, symptoms can turn into a long-term disease.

Symptoms of reactive arthritis can include:

- Joint swelling and pain.
- Inflammation of the urinary and genital tract.
- Redness and swelling of the eyes.
- Mouth sores and skin rashes.

## What causes it?

Reactive arthritis may be set off by an infection in the bladder or the urethra, which carries urine out of the body. In women, an infection in the vagina can spark the reaction. For both men and women, it can start with bacteria passed on during sex. Another form of reactive arthritis starts with eating food or handling something that has bacteria on it.

You can't pass your reactive arthritis on to someone else. However, you can pass along the bacteria that can trigger the disease.

Doctors do not know why some people develop reactive arthritis and others do not.

## Is there a test?

There is no specific lab test to confirm that you have reactive arthritis. Doctors sometimes find it difficult to diagnose. Tests the doctor may order include:

- Complete medical history.
- Blood tests.
- Tests for infections.
- X-rays.

## How is it treated?

There is no cure for reactive arthritis, but some treatments ease the symptoms. Your doctor might use one or more of the following:

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) to treat pain and inflammation.
- Corticosteroids injected into painful joints or applied to skin sores.
- Antibiotics to fight the bacterial infection that triggered the disease.
- Medicines to stop the immune system from attacking its own tissues.

## Who treats it?

Diagnosing and treating reactive arthritis requires a team effort involving you and several types of health care professionals. These may include:

- Rheumatologists, who specialize in arthritis and other diseases of the bones, joints, and muscles. Your rheumatologist will also coordinate care between your different doctors.
- Ophthalmologists, who treat eye disease.
- Urologists or gynecologists, who treat genital symptoms.
- Dermatologists, who treat skin symptoms.
- Orthopaedists, who perform surgery on severely damaged joints.
- Physiatrists, who help with exercise programs.

## Living With It

Exercise can reduce joint pain and stiffness. It can also help you lose weight to reduce stress on joints. You should speak to your doctor about a safe, well-rounded exercise program.

## For More Info

### **U.S. Food and Drug Administration**

Toll free: 888-INFO-FDA (888-463-6332)

Website: <https://www.fda.gov>

Drugs@FDA at <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/drugsatfda>. Drugs@FDA is a searchable catalog of FDA-approved drug products.

### **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics**

Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

### **National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases**

Website: <https://www.niaid.nih.gov>

### **American College of Rheumatology**

Website: <https://www.rheumatology.org>

### **Arthritis Foundation**

Website: <https://www.arthritis.org>

### **Spondylitis Association of America**

Website: <https://www.spondylitis.org>

If you need more information about available resources in your language or other languages, please visit our webpages below or contact the NIAMS Information Clearinghouse at [NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov](mailto:NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov).

- [Asian Language Health Information](#)
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[Arthritis, Living With: Health Information Basics for You and Your Family](#)

[Knee Problems, Questions and Answers about](#)

[Reactive Arthritis, Questions and Answers](#)